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Resolute Action Against Untenable Conditions in Health Care Quebec Nurses' "No Mandatory Overtime" Day of Action on April 8



Protest against poor working conditions including mandatory overtime, March 28, 2019 outside health care human resources offices in the Laurentians.

On April 8, nurses belonging to the Interprofessional Health Care Federation of Quebec (FIQ) are holding a No Mandatory Overtime Day of Action, under the theme "Mandatory Overtime Has Gone On Long Enough." At a press conference in Montreal on April 2, FIQ President Nancy Bédard presented the action's aim: "On April 8, health care professionals want to opt for their own physical and mental health, their personal and family lives. Just like the vast majority of the population, they want a normal work day, without risk of being taken hostage. That's the goal behind this unprecedented day [of action]," she noted.

On April 5, the Administrative Labour Tribunal ordered the FIQ to inform its members that on that day of action, the nurses will have to agree to any request for mandatory overtime if such overtime is required due to an urgent and exceptional situation, as is supposed to be the case. The Tribunal noted that health care facilities management affected by the nurses' action have stated that they have taken all the necessary means and measures to avoid the use of overtime on that day. The FIQ said it was satisfied with the ruling: "What she [the judge] is ordering us to do is what we said we would do on April 2," said Nancy Bédard. "Nurses will always be there for mandatory overtime if necessary, during real emergencies, real exceptional situations, and that's what the ruling says. Urgent and exceptional measures must be unforeseen and unexpected

situations. They will not be able to use [the excuse of] mandatory overtime to compensate for their lack of planning," she added.

The FIQ President described the systematic use of mandatory overtime as a form of organizational violence against nurses.

"This practice has become an actual management method that undermines the rights of health care professionals and has a direct impact on the quality and safety of care. April 8 should be a jolt to all managers in the network. When mandatory overtime is 'planned' in advance, it is no longer an emergency. The code of conduct requires that overtime be used as an

exceptional and emergency measure, and this is not currently the case. What should be an exceptional measure has been established in many institutions as current management procedure. It is inhuman and dangerous for both health care professionals and patients," she said.



According to the FIQ, the practice of mandatory overtime goes far beyond the issue of labour relations. It undermines the safety of care and has a direct impact on patients. Women are the first victims of mandatory overtime since they represent 90 per cent of the members of the federation. Thousands of mothers, spouses and caregivers find themselves forced to work extra shifts. Their profession is one where this inhuman practice is rampant, and this, on a daily basis.

In a brief presented to the Quebec government in May 2018, the FIQ states that in 2014-2015, Quebec nurses worked 4.5 million overtime hours. Burnout among workers in the health system has reached an unprecedented level. There is currently an explosion in the number of disabilities for psychological diagnoses among workers in the health network, including a 47 per cent increase at the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) in Estrie; 35 per cent at the McGill University Health Centre; and 31 per cent at the CISSS in Montérégie-Est. According to the FIQ, overtime hours have a significant impact on the number of errors committed and the systematic use of overtime significantly increases the risk of mortality in hospitals, citing a four per cent increase in incidents and accidents during the delivery of health care in Quebec facilities in 2016-2017.

One of the aims of the day is to make an urgent appeal to the Minister of Health and Social Services to go beyond declarations and take concrete action to end the mandatory overtime.

"However, this wish will remain unfulfilled if managers are not required to make profound changes," said Nancy Bédard. "A clear message must be sent that the days when the entire functioning of the health network rested on the shoulders of health care professionals are over. It is urgent to act! We shared with the Minister a multitude of solutions including the deployment of health care professional-to-patient ratios through legislation. We hope there is going to be a [marked difference] before and after April 8, 2019. We are hopeful that this day will be one of significant change. If not, we will continue our struggle and the next few months could be quite intense," concluded the FIQ President.

The FIQ represents close to 76,000 nurses, practical nurses, respiratory therapists and clinical perfusionists working in health care facilities throughout Quebec.

(Photos: FIQ)